

Are You Part of a Professional Learning Community?

How to find out and what to do about it!

Are You Part of a Professional Learning Community?

“...the most promising strategy for substantive school improvement is developing the capacity for school personnel to function as a professional learning community (PLC).”

Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour, *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*

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Possible alternative titled for today's program:

**Response to Intervention:
How a Professional
Learning Community
Responds to the Needs of
Special Education
Students**

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A Professional Learning Community is NOT:

- A program to be implemented
- A package of reforms to be adopted
- A step-by-step recipe for change
- A sure-fire system borrowed from another school
- One more thing to add to an already cluttered school agenda

A PLC IS A PROCESS THAT WILL CHANGE A SCHOOL'S CULTURE!

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In traditional schools:

- The focus is on teaching
- Teaching is done in isolation
- Teachers think of themselves as autonomous, independent contractors
- Most teachers have little input into the school's vision and mission statements
- The school's mission statement is generic and tangential to classroom work

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In traditional schools (continued):

- The principal makes the decisions and teachers do what (and only what) they are told to do.
- The curriculum and the textbook are one and the same.
- Assessments are norm-based.
- Test results are used for grading purposes only.
- Students who do not learn are given the opportunity to catch up. The rest is up to them.

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“Decades of research and reform have not altered the fundamental facts of teaching. The task of universal, public education is still being conducted by a woman [or man] alone in a little room, presiding over a youthful distillate of a town or city.”

Tracy Kidder as quoted on page 17 in the book *On Common Ground*

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In an era in which cable television and the Internet routinely broadcast almost every imaginable human activity...

teaching may be the last private act in America.

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The Charles Darwin School

Motto: We believe that all kids can learn – based upon their ability.

- Student aptitude is fixed and not subject to influence by teachers.
- As a result, we create multiple programs or tracks to address differing ability levels.
- Tracking gives students the best chance of mastering the content that is appropriate to their abilities.

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The Pontius Pilate School

Motto: We believe that all kids can learn...if they take advantage of the opportunity we give them to learn.

- It is the teacher's job to provide all students with an opportunity to learn by presenting lessons that are clear and engaging.
- It is the student's job to learn, and if they elect not to do so, we must hold them accountable for their decisions.

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The Chicago Cub Fan School

Motto: We believe that all kids can learn
...something, and we will help all students
experience academic growth in a warm and
nurturing environment.

- A student's growth is determined by a combination of his/her innate ability and effort.
- Since we have little impact on either, we will create an environment that fosters their sense of well-being and self-esteem.

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The Henry Higgins School

Motto: We believe that all students can and must learn at relatively high levels of achievement, and our responsibility is to work with each student until our high standards have been achieved.

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The Essential Elements of a PLC are:

1. A PLC is a collaborative venture.
2. A PLC is always focused on student learning.
3. A PLC distributes leadership responsibilities.
4. A PLC narrows the curriculum to its essence.
5. A PLC shares best practices as a means of improving instruction.
6. A PLC uses “assessment for learning” in addition to the usual “assessment of learning.”

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1. A PLC is a collaborative venture.

“Quality teaching requires strong professional learning communities. Collegial interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers. Communities of learners can no longer be considered utopian; they must become the building blocks that establish a new foundation for America’s Schools.”

National Commission on Teaching, 2003

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1. A PLC is a collaborative venture.

“Isolation is the enemy of learning. Principals who support the learning of adults in their school organize teachers schedules to provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together.”

NAESP, *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*

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2. A PLC is always focused on student learning.

“In a professional learning community...attempts at school improvement are judged on the basis of how student learning is affected.”

Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour, *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*

“...ultimately, a learning organization is judged by results.”

Peter Senge, *Schools that Learn*

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2. A PLC is always focused on student learning. Each of the DuFour books identifies the same three questions as critical to the PLC work.

1. Exactly what is it that we want all students to learn?
2. How will we know when each has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?

3. What happens in our school when students do not learn?

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2. A PLC is always focused on student learning.

“Our objective in writing this book is not to help schools raise test scores and avoid sanctions. We should...promote high levels of learning for every child entrusted to us, not because of legislation or fear of sanctions, but because we have a moral and ethical imperative to do so...test scores will take care of themselves if educators commit to ensuring that each student masters essential skills and concepts in every unit of instruction...”

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3. A PLC distributes leadership responsibilities.

“In professional learning communities, administrators are viewed as leaders of leaders. Teachers are viewed as transformational leaders.”

Getting Started, page 22

“The norms of behavior for any organization are shaped by what the leaders tolerate.”

Whatever It Takes, page 145

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4. A PLC narrows the curriculum to its essence.

“In a professional learning community, time is viewed as a precious resource, so attempts are made to focus our efforts on less, but more meaningful content. The time that is saved allows the teaching of more meaningful content at a greater depth.”

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5. A PLC shares best practices as a means of improving instruction.

“The PLC concept is specifically designed to develop the collective capacity of a staff to work together to achieve the fundamental purpose of the school: high levels of learning for all students. Leaders of the process purposefully set out to create the conditions that enable teachers to learn from one another as part of their routine work practices. Continuous learning becomes school based and job embedded.”

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6. A PLC uses “assessment for learning” in addition to the usual “assessment of learning.”

The traditional approach of using classroom assessments solely as a grading tool fails to utilize the enormous potential of such assessments to identify students who need additional support and to inform the teacher regarding effective and ineffective elements of his/her practice.

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6. A PLC uses “assessment for learning” in addition to the usual “assessment of learning.”

“...I have used the analogy of physicals and autopsies. Without putting too fine a point on the metaphor, physicals at a certain point in life can be an uncomfortable ordeal but, on the whole, they are preferable to and less intrusive than autopsies. The wise physician does not use the annual physical only to evaluate the patient, but also to recommend improvements in lifestyle. From the best of our family doctors, we receive not the hieroglyphics of lab results, but also candid advice to replace candy with carrots and the television with a treadmill. The keys to assessment for learning – the physical rather than the autopsy – are consistency, timeliness, and differentiation.

Douglas Reeves as quoted in *On Common Ground*, page 53

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6. A PLC uses “assessment for learning” in addition to the usual “assessment of learning.”

Research reveals that significant improvement occurs in student learning when the following classroom assessment practices are in place.

- Sharing clear and appropriate learning targets with students from the beginning of learning.
- Increasing the accuracy of classroom assessments of the stated targets
- Making sure that students have continuous access to descriptive feedback
- Involving students continuously in classroom assessments, record keeping, and communication processes.

Rick Stiggins as quoted in *On Common Ground*, page 67

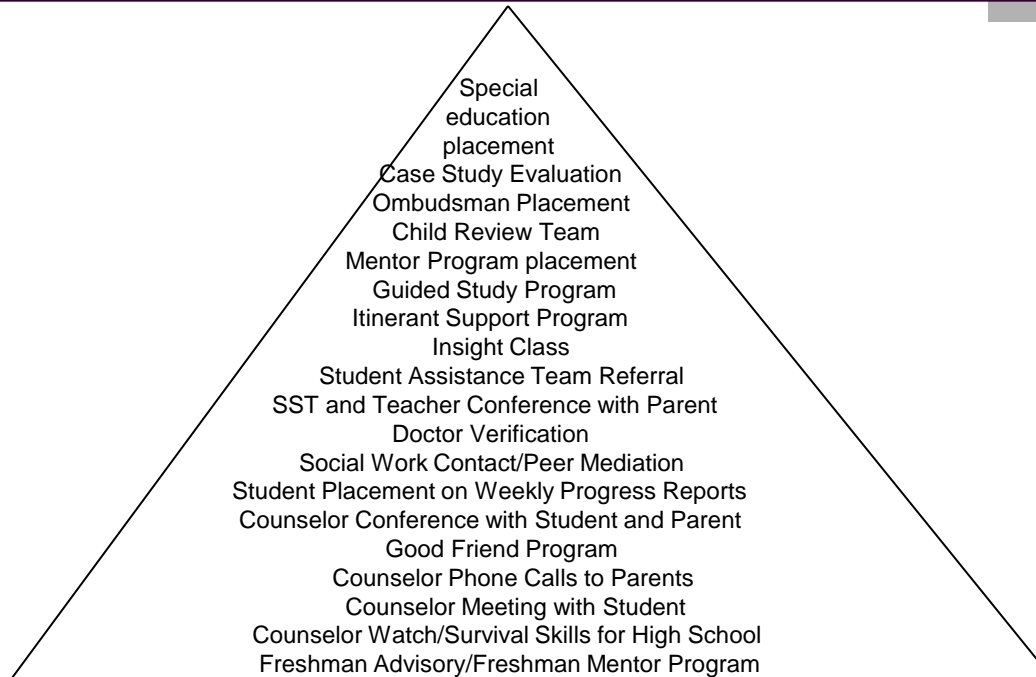
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6. A PLC uses “assessment for learning” in addition to the usual “assessment of learning.”

Working as a team, PLCs typically:

- Develop common assessments.
- Develop a common rubric.
- Examine student work.
- Strategize common interventions.
- Provide objective feedback to one another.
- Use student results to revise assessment instrument.

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Adlai E. Stevenson High School Pyramid of Interventions

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“The issue is not that individual teachers and schools do not innovate and change all the time. They do. The problem is with the kinds of change that occur in the educational system, their fragile quality, and their random and idiosyncratic nature.”

Consortium on Productivity in Schools, *Using What We Have to Get the Schools that We Need*, 1995

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**It is time for
everyone to be
pointed in the same
direction and
working on the
same agenda!**

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**None of us
know what all
of us know!**

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“In times of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves beautifully equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”

Eric Hoffer as quoted in Failure is Not an Option, page 1

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A Short Bibliography for More Information about Professional Learning Communities

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- Professional Learning Communities At Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker
- Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*, Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek, 2004

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